

Missile Defense Countdown

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\$5 Billion Decision Is Near, U.S. Tells Kremlin Leaders

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The United States is telling Russia that unless arms control talks begin soon, the U.S. will start building a \$5 billion defense system against small-scale nuclear attack.

For more than a year, President Johnson has held off making the political decision to authorize setting up what is known as a "thin anti-ballistic missile (ABM) system" around key cities and U.S. missile sites.

A "thin system" would guard against future Red Chinese nuclear missile attacks and offer some protection against a limited Russian attack. It could not defend against an all-out Soviet missile assault.

Johnson has delayed because of a desire to engage in direct negotiations with Moscow on a general freeze in both offensive and defensive missile systems.

The Russians have started work on a small-scale system of

their own, but Johnson has felt that a U.S. decision to begin building an ABM network would hurt the chances for successful Soviet-American talks.

Although Soviet Premier Alexei N. Kosygin last winter agreed in principle to arms control talks, the Kremlin so far has stalled on setting a time and place.

Meanwhile, Johnson has been under heavy pressure from the Joint Chiefs of Staff and several key congressional leaders to authorize deployment in the coming year.

As a result, word has been passed to the Kremlin that the United States is willing to wait a reasonable length of time for Russia to talk, but that without agreement, Johnson would authorize deployment of the "thin system" aimed at guarding against an attack once Red China has intercontinental missiles.

Such a "thin" system would

cost several million dollars in the first year, and in total about \$5 billion.

Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara has told Congress that China is expected to have an intercontinental ballistic missile armed with nuclear warheads by the early 1970s. He has also said that a "thin system" could keep U.S. losses in event of a Chinese attack to less than 1 million persons.

Even if China created a system beyond present U.S. forecasts, U.S. losses would still be about 1 million, McNamara said, with an effective small-scale ABM. Without an ABM losses could run as much as 5 to 10 million.

Such a system also would be effective in guarding against a small-scale Russian attack and against any nuclear "accident." It would be ineffective against an all-out Russian attack.

McNamara has said there is no system that either the United

States or Russia could build that would guard effectively against an all-out attack by the other.

An American system to ward off such an attack would cost from \$40 to \$70 billion, and would undoubtedly touch off a new cycle of the missile race. But losses in case of attack would be catastrophic—more than 100 million persons.

Secretary of State Dean Rusk hinted of the administration's impatience with the Soviet delay by telling a press conference Friday that "time is becoming urgent" on the subject. He suggested that the United States

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could not wait much longer for the Russians just to get around to talking.

"We'd like to have discussions about both offensive and defensive missiles just as soon as possible," Rusk said. "We would hope very much that the Soviet Union would set a date for such discussions and that both sides would be prepared to put in

specific and detailed proposals that would bring this matter under control."

He added that "no such date has been established."

"We'll continue to try and we'll see what happens, but this is a matter of some urgency."

Yesterday, Sen. John O. Pastore, D-R.I., chairman of the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy, said the United States

should move "full speed ahead" on building an ABM system.

Trial Balloon?

Pastore's remarks were important because he usually is a supporter of Johnson's nuclear policies. The speech touched off speculation that Pastore was floating a trial balloon—for the Russians to spot—without committing the President to a decision.

Pastore announced that Sen. Henry M. Jackson's subcommittee would soon hold hearings on the whole ABM question. This inevitably will cause the administration to seek arguments to counter the Joint Chiefs' unanimous view that deployment of the ABM system should begin promptly.

Only an agreement by the Russians to talk, it is believed, could serve as a satisfactory answer.

McNamara, in his testimony, has never attacked the idea of deploying a "thin system," and it is understood that he now agrees that such a setup would be worthwhile.

But he is aware that even deployment of a small-scale defense would set off momentum to go ahead with a full-scale system—which he thinks would be a waste of money.

U.S. intelligence is certain that Russia is building an ABM system around Moscow. A second system—the so-called "Tallin" system—is being erected around other areas, but it is still unclear whether the Tallin is an ABM or a new anti-aircraft defense network.

The United States for years has worked on plans for an ABM system. The present U.S. system is the Nike-X, a highly sophisticated complex that includes missiles that go straight up and missiles that fire in an arch—the latter to meet incoming missiles

at sea, the former to attack those that reach the target area.

Because it is inevitable that nuclear warheads would be exploded in the air during such an attack, McNamara has said it makes no sense to deploy an ABM without also building a system of fall-out shelters.

The View From Russia

The Russians have traditionally been defense-conscious and have not shared the U.S. concern about the need for an ABM freeze. They have proposed elimination of offensive weapons—the field where the U.S. leads. As the result, the United States has proposed talks on both defensive and offensive weapons systems.

Kosygin accepted the idea of talks in principle last winter, but despite prodding from Washington, his government has not implemented the decision.

At the Glassboro (N.J.) summit conference in June, Johnson and McNamara both discussed the need for a missile freeze with Kosygin. Informed sources said Kosygin seemed angered by the suggestion and replied that an ABM was not as provocative as the U.S. ICBMs.

There has been very little discussion in the Soviet press about an ABM. Soviet military leaders, in extolling Russia's defenses, have said that they can ward off any airplane attack and "many" missiles.

Soviet civil defense officials have warned their populations not to hope they will be immune from nuclear destruction in time of war.

This only means that Soviet leaders realistically believe they cannot ward off all missiles. It does not mean that they consider an ABM a waste of money.

They may feel—as do the Joint Chiefs here—that any defense is better than no defense.